VIOLENCE IN THE STORIES OF FRANK SARGESON

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The stories of Frank Sargeson[1] contains the bulk of the short fiction produced by New Zealand's foremost writer. Sargeson's fame as a writer of short stories is such that Dennis McEldowney, in **Islands** 21 (1978), with justification speaks of 'the received opinion that only the short-story Sargeson really matters'.[2] Whether or not the received opinion is correct, it does seem to me that Sargeson's stories, particularly those portraying violence, are generally misinterpreted.

Let us consider some of the critical comments on such stories. Referring to 'Sale Day', H. Winston Rhodes speaks of the 'brutal burning of the cat . . . a horrifying climax'.[3] R.A. Copland mentions what he sees as 'the shocking symbolic event . . . with which the story is resolved'.[4] 'A Good Boy' provokes from E.A. Horsman[5] the comment that the protagonist shows 'a profounder corruption with which his parents had little to do'; this corruption apparently, in Horsman's view, accounts for the murder committed by the boy. Discussing 'I've Lost my Pal', Horsman says that 'for the acquiescent narrator anything goes, even murder'. (The story is one in which the narrator's friend has been killed by George, a homosexual.) The notable 'A Great Day' appears to be generally seen as a story about mateship betrayed by Fred, who murders Ken: Winston Rhodes sees Fred's action as a 'crime' prepared by a man with 'a twisted mind in a weedy body' (p.70); Copland, concurring, views Fred as a man who 'criminally abandons his mate' (p.13).

It would become tedious as well as unnecessary, at this stage, to give a more elaborate summary of such critical opinions. What they illustrate — and they seem to me far from unrepresentative—is a belief that violence, which fortunately is still generally disapproved of by most academics, is naturally also rejected by the author. The argument appears to be that such deeds as the burning of a cat are so repugnant to most of us that we must assume that Sargeson, too, uses such an incident to show his disapproval of anyone responsible for it.

Unwelcome though my approach may be, I see it as my duty to demonstrate that this view of Sargeson is quite wrong, and that, although Sargeson is certainly not uniformly in favour of violence, he defends it far more readily at least on an imaginative plane, than do his critics. In all the stories so far

mentioned, and also in some others, the author's sympathy lies wholly or at least to a considerable extent with the character committing a violent deed. In some stories which hardly involve physical violence, Sargeson might be argued to support some form of mental violence.[6] In other circumstances, however, his attitude seems to be close to what is still, in civilized Western societies, considered to be the conventionally respectable one.[7] I propose to look at these various aspects in some detail — notably at some of the physically spectacularly violent stories which I believe manifest the dangerous tendencies (if one may for a moment moralize) that Sargeson's readers give evidence of too often having overlooked.

The earliest story in the volume which shows a quite remarkable attitude towards violence is the arrestingly presented but persistently ignored 'Cats by the Tail'. It belongs to the short early pieces — of which it is only the second- which presumably Horsman (in the essay quoted before) has in mind when he tantalizes us with a reference to early 'opinionated' sketches without going into further detail. The so-called opinionated sketch, however, illustrates quite clearly just the same tendencies as Horsman does not observe in the later Sargeson. Far from avoiding such an early piece, we should look at it closely to assess whether it indeed confirms the suspicions which we might also have about more famous stories such as 'A Great Day', 'A Good Boy', and 'The Hole that Jack Dug'.

'Cats by the Tail' is told by a narrator who is treated with some irony:

> It all seems to me pretty serious. How are we going to run a League of Nations if we can't take our minds off cake, and holding cats up by the tail?

Obviously, the character is being mocked, and Sargeson himself does not think it 'pretty serious' if people have their minds fixed on cake or holding cats up by the tail. At the risk of sounding pompous in the face of this **badinerie**, it should nevertheless be pointed out that there is a considerable difference between the two things mentioned: in the one instance, we have an example of indulgence, in the other of cruelty (however innocent) at the expense of another creature. The impression of callousness on the part of the author is not taken away if we look at some other details. For example:

> I asked him didn't he like holding cats up by the tail?
> He said he did. ***He's a dear little chap.***

The odd last sentence, which I have italicized,[8] is unfortunately not ironic. Either Sargeson is poking fun at the narrator in the earlier quotation or here; he could not consistently do it in both cases, and it is not difficult to decide in which of the two he is. Furthermore, the 'dear little chap' almost certainly receives the author's sympathy virtually as a matter of principle in that (as

many commentators have observed) Sargeson sides with children against adults, or at least adults who are not in some way outsiders to New Zealand society. And so here:

> Now I'd always though Wordsworth was wrong in that bit about the child being father of the man. But I'm not so sure. I've gone about asking people, don't they like cake better than anything else in all the world? And don't they like holding cats up by the tail? They were all quite nice people. They all said, what nonsense!

But it transpires that in the narrator's-no doubt correct-estimation, they **did** actually like the things which they claimed they did not. And the author's point is not, of course, that there is anything particularly wrong with their inclinations. Rather, the decline away from being a 'dear little chap' lies in one's not confessing to one's impulses. The proper Wordsworthian attitude, in Sargeson's view, is clearly that it is the boy's willingness to do so which makes him superior to adults who do not, and who implicitly are seen to adopt a censorious stance based on an un-Romantic 'bourgeois' morality. It is the insincerity of that morality which is being attacked, not the childish impulse, even if this leads to actions which as readers we may well reject. Sargeson's dichotomy is, on inspection, the product of mythmaking about supposed distinctions that he sees as governing human actions: the reasoning is that one is either the 'dear little chap' or a lying adult, and there is violence even in this typecasting.

The last point is an extremely important one in considering **why** Sargeson upholds the attitude of the little boy. Even if he does not totally admire it (and there is no way of telling that he does not), the fact remains that evidently he believes in the existence of an opposition considerably more repugnant. His typical procedure, as we shall also see elsewhere, is to create two 'parties', whether or not these are small, and to keep out of our vision anything that might interfere with the restricted choice which he puts before us. Invariably we are invited to believe, for example, that there must be something seriously wrong with people who like money, or such things as money can buy: hence the dislike of the undertaker in 'The Undertaker's Story', or of Jack's 'missis' in 'The Hole that Jack Dug'. The villains, who are products of his Romantic imagination rather than life-like, are presented in such a way that the reader is compelled into taking the side of their opponents, even if a less Romantic mind than Sargeson's finds plenty to criticize in these. It is this circumstance which leads a commentator like Horsman astray in asking 'Is the undertaker entirely repudiated or the Colonel's daughter entirely approved?' The two questions are of a different order, and it is possible to say 'yes' to the first question without also having to do so to the second.[9] Perhaps the Colonel's

daughter is not entirely approved, but if she is not, then this does not do away with the fact that in Sargeson's view she is infinitely preferable to her opponents. Hence, whatever we might think about such a character in isolation, within the rhetorical context of the story we are asked to excuse whatever unorthodox things she does. The reader, once he is willing to accept Sargeson's premises, is constantly required to take sides, however reluctant he may be if he finds it difficult to forget his own. Even violence too easily becomes defensible if one takes Sargeson's view of the world, just as stealing is in 'That Summer': Bill's thefts of money are excused on the reasoning that (a) he is so humane and loyal in looking after his mate, and (b) he is robbing those who could well do with less, living in a different suburb during a depression which Bill is a pitiable victim of. (The fact that he has given up his job out of his own free will and because of 'itchy feet' is conveniently overlooked.)

'A Good Boy' is a telling example of Sargeson's manipulation of the reader into accepting, or at least finding some excuse for, an action less sadistic than that of holding up a cat by the tail, but nevertheless sufficiently violent rightly to upset Horsman-since it is undeniably a form of murder. Whether one is actually willing or not to use so ugly a word depends on whether or not one is willing to accept Sargeson's explanations and excuses for his protagonist. Let us consider how he sets about offering these to his reader.

The basic opposition in the story is the very common Sargesonian one of 'life-stifling materialistic protestant' versus 'unorthodox, somewhat muddled-up but basically humane and innocent child or childlike outsider'. All the vitality in the story, everything seemingly positive in life, is to be found in the narrator. One way Sargeson directs us towards this view is by showing us how very much more attractive the boy's activities must surely seem than those which his parents want him to partake in. Do we not all prefer playing the wag 'instead of going to Sunday school'? Do we not all sympathize with a boy who goes 'to that billiard saloon . . . because father and mother would never have stood for it'? And we are meant to reject the 'goodness' of such people, who won't let their child be happy and are themselves described in such terms as these:

> They didn't seem to have any pleasure in life. Father never went out after he'd come home from work. He just sat and read the paper. His stomach was bad too, and made noises, and he kept on saying, Pardon. It used to get on my nerves.

Similarly, there must be something amiss with a father who makes his son 'swot at book-keeping so I could be an accountant instead of just a dry-cleaner like him'. I see no evidence at all for Horsman's notion that in this protagonist we see 'a profounder corruption with which his parents had little to do'. On

the contrary, the corrupting influence is, chiefly, his father, though his mother is little better. How can we possibly doubt this, if the protagonist, who kills his more or less promiscuous girlfriend after he '**found** her **out**', explains that he 'went all righteous just like father and mother used to go when they caught me or anyone else playing them a dirty trick'? The narrator does not accept an independent vitalistic will in his girlfriend and tries to stamp this out just as his parents have always tried to do with him, notably when his father '**found out**' about his going to the billiard saloon where he had such 'real good fun'. The true goodness of the boy is apparent, too, from something always idealized by Sargeson: his capacity for mateship ('Me and the boys were all good cobbers too'). In conventional terms, the narrator has never wanted to be 'a good boy',

> . . . all except that one time when I did the right thing just like father and mother had always tried to teach me. That was the time I killed that girl.

In other words, the narrator's violence is something for which he can hardly be held responsible. In the view of Sargeson, who uses the word 'good' with Blakean irony,[10] this 'bad' boy as during much of his life he may conventionally seem is really quite acceptable, and indeed preferable to his parents. These, however, are so anti-life that even though the narrator tries to follow his own impulses, parental tyranny inevitably catches up with him: first physically, when he is punished for going to the billiard saloon, and then more insidiously and mentally when, quite without his knowing it, his parents kill **through** him. I am not suggesting that Sargeson accepts murder as such, but it is the motivation behind the murder that interests him, and this, since the boy apparently cannot be held culpable for something he does not know about, leads Sargeson to excuse the actual physical perpetrator of the crime—the murderer if not the murder or what Sargeson sees as the **true** murderers. He is so anxious to establish the boy's innocence that he twice explicitly through his mouth explains that the protagonist merely did what 'father and mother had always tried to teach me'.

Now, let us return to 'Sale Day', which I mentioned at the outset as a story about which Winston Rhodes and Copland are united in thinking that the male protagonist is held up for our disapproval, and which, if I understand them correctly, seems to them to have a climax not only 'brutal', but also 'symbolic'—of, one supposes, what the hero does to his own sensuality. Indeed, Winston Rhodes appears to be fairly explicit on the matter, viewing the hero as 'tormented by pride in his masculine virility, by his uncertainty whether he is able to control his sexual desires and by a violent revulsion against the knowledge of his own kinship with the animals, all of which find their outlet in the cremation of the live cat'.[11]

We have just seen that the protagonist of 'A Good Boy' commits murder—of his girlfriend—for which his parents are blamed rather than he, and which, in Sargeson, seems to evoke surprisingly little feeling for the victim. Prior to our consideration of 'A Good Boy', we examined 'Cats by the Tail', and there found that Sargeson views holding up a cat by the tail quite favourably in a little boy ('He's a dear little chap'), and assumes that grown-ups only differ from boys in not owning up to their desires.

These circumstances do not augur well for interpreters who assume that a male who kills a cat obviously liked by a woman he desires is necessarily going to meet with Sargeson's disapproval. I do not mean that Sargeson would be incapable of varying his views from one story to another, but I do wish to propose that if a responsible critical reading of story C bears out views arrived at by analysis of stories A and B, then that reading is more likely to do justice to the author's views than one which reads the stories in separation from each other. As will become obvious, there is nothing inconsistent about the argument developed in this essay; yet Winston Rhodes, for example, is confronted with the critical difficulty of having to reconcile his defence of the murderers in 'A Good Boy' and 'I've Lost My Pal' (which I shall consider later) with his strong objections to Victor, the killer in 'Sale Day'.[12]

Furthermore, commentators have failed to realize that Sargeson's story is to a large extent based on 'The Fox' by D H Lawrence; awareness of this fact will further lead us towards the view that the hero of 'Sale Day' is not to be judged according to the standards — perfectly humane, I concede — of Winston Rhodes and Copland.

On a narrative level, 'Sale Day' takes us only as far as the first murder in 'The Fox', the killing of that animal by Henry. Even on a casual inspection, the situation thus far is much the same in both stories. In both instances, there is the similarity of a farmhouse setting. Sargeson omits a character like Banford, who is later killed by Henry in 'The Fox', and concentrates more fully on the intense relations between man-animal-woman, resulting in the killing of the animal by the man. In case it be asked why, if Sargeson is so close to Lawrence, he chose for his animal a cat and not a fox, the answer must be that a fox would **too** obviously have made him a Lawrence-imitator, while yet a careful reader of Lawrence's **Three Novellas**[13] will not overlook the fact that in Lawrence's own vision the similarity between cat and fox is considerable. For example, Lawrence speaks of Henry's voice as 'so soft it seemed rather like a subtle touch, like the merest touch of a cat's paw' (p.105). The similarity between Henry and the fox is of course one of the main points of Lawrence's story, though this is not to say that he sees the two as the same

(Sargeson, as his follower, also sees two separate creatures). Again, there is great resemblance between the fox-Henry on the one hand, and the cat-Count of 'The Ladybird' on the other, and Sargeson's assertion that his cat 'was a tom' may well derive from the Count's that he is 'a black tom-cat howling in the night, and it is then that fire comes out of me' (p.36). It is probably not insignificant that Lawrence's cat reminds one of Blake's tiger and that Sargeson throughout his stories owes a large debt to Blake: this may enable us to see that, just as Lawrence's tom-cat or fox **and what such a creature symbolizes** is handled with ironic approval by the author, so it may be with Sargeson's animal.

The chief symbolic function of the tom-cat in both authors, or the fox in Lawrence, is to represent the male sensual will,[14] which must triumph over the female. Just as the tom-cat in 'The Ladybird' must triumph over Lady Daphne and the Fox in 'The Fox' must over March, so must the tom-cat in 'Sale Day' over Elsie. However, we must be exactly aware of the function of the symbol in each case. The fox symbolizes Henry's sensual will as the tom-cat does Victor's, but at the same time, as I have indicated, each animal also has independent existence. The chief point of the killing of the fox in Lawrence's story is that this act allows the male sensual will to actualize itself without further competition from a rival-animal. It is as a result of this killing that March learns to give in to Henry and that she anticipates in a dream the next murder, of Banford, when Henry eliminates his female competitor for March's allegiance. In Lawrence's version, the animal represents male sensual will which is by no means condemned, but which fully becomes the male hero's property once he eliminates the animal as a rival and thus succeeds in winning the female.

It seems to me quite evident from this and from a reading of 'Sale Day' that Sargeson's basic intention was the same as Lawrence's. One may submit that Sargeson is more markedly puritanical, or at least that his story gives more evidence of puritanism being fought. If the cat symbolizes Victor's male sensual will, it seems that Victor views that with some distaste in calling the cat 'randy', and saying 'I don't particularly like myself'. However, there is a shift in emphasis as the story progresses:

> The cat came and rubbed itself against Elsie's legs, and bent over to stroke it.
> Don't touch him, Victor said. The randy brute stinks.
> It's only nature, Elsie said.
> You're nature too, Elsie. So am I.
> Well, what about it?
> That's what I say. What about it?
> Pussy cat, Elsie said.

> Nature's bloody awful, Victor went on.
> Oh, go on. Put your shirt on.
> In a mo. I've got a sensitive nature, Elsie.

'It's only nature . . . You're nature too . . . So am I' may at first sight point to an equation of the sensuality in all three beings, or at any rate an attempt on Victor's part to equate Elsie's (supposed) sensuality with what for the moment looks like unquestioned similarity between him and the cat. But Victor goes on to differentiate between the cat and himself when Elsie does not accept his argument. It seems that she does (and provokes him) when saying 'Well, what about it?' But when Victor pushes the equation further, she shrinks back: her 'Pussy cat' strongly suggests that 'nature' is all right with cats, but not with humans. One can accept as 'only nature' that cats stink. One will stroke them when they rub themselves against one's legs, but will (because of puritanical morality) treat human males differently. Victor learns from this argument in an ironic way. He does not accept the (implied) proposition that cats are 'randy' (as he himself had admitted) and that therefore the human male should deny its own sensuality. On the contrary, the male's sensuality should be seen as superior to that of a cat. 'Nature's bloody awful' is beautifully ambiguous. Sargeson certainly does not mean that **all** nature is truly awful and that therefore Victor will be right to stamp out his own sensuality — supposedly — by killing the cat. What Sargeson does mean, is that to the conventional view male sensuality (in a cat, male, or Blake's frightening tiger) is 'awful' (**because** 'bloody') and must be avoided; but that from the Laurentian (as well as Nietzschean or Freudian?) view it is proper that it should be allowed its way. Since Elsie has not compehended Victor's point that she is 'nature too . . . So am I', he now has to become considerably clearer about what is at stake: nothing less than that the will of the sensual human male may not be thwarted. He at first tries to carry the import of his remarks by distinguishing between his own 'sensitive' nature and that of the cat, but this appeal to her instinct through conventional language fails:

> Living all your life on a farm you see too damn much of nature, Victor said. It's no good if you've got a sensitive nature yourself.
> You want to take life as it comes.
> I bet that's what you did. You're engaged, aren't you Elsie?
> Give us a proper look at the ring.
> No I won't. You can see it good enough.
> Well, tell us about the lucky bloke.
> That's my business.
> O.K. Have it your own way.

Victor means, in crediting himself with a 'sensitive nature', that his own nature responds to, and is aroused by, what is around him. Elsie takes him to mean,

or pretends that she takes him to mean, something much more genteel, e.g. 'a man with a sensitive nature cannot stand blood', or 'someone like me can't tolerate a randy smell'. Elsie's 'You want to take life as it comes' has the deep implication (unobserved or rejected by her) of 'You should take nature—in all its aspects—as it comes', but, as Victor understands, has behind it the weight of established social convention and thus assumes the sense of 'You are better off accepting society's ways than acting on your own impulses'. The conversation is thus largely drawn into the social sphere, with marriage getting discussed rather than sex acted out. The language throughout the passage is used with wonderful expertise: we should ponder in what sense Victor wants to have a 'proper' look at the ring; why it is, apart from allegiance to a New Zealand idiom on Sargeson's part, that Elsie says that Victor can see it **good** enough, and just to what extent Elsie's forthcoming wedding to the 'lucky bloke' will indeed be her 'business'. At all events, Sargeson's way with words increasingly juxtaposes a conventional (puritanical/materialistic) attitude and a more basic animalistic one which can only lead to a stalemate, with Victor stroking his own muscles and Elsie (perversely, in the Laurentian-Sargesonian view) stroking the cat, which sensually responds by purring.

That is, a stalemate is presumably inevitable so long as one continues to use the words of society: the only way for Victor to become truly victorious—and who could deny that he is called **Victor** because he is to be?—is through physical action, which, thus the author suggests, **will** have its course. Victor, using Elsie's language, may **say**, 'Have it your own way', but his **actions** are designed to assert his own superiority. Once the cat starts purring (showing its own sensuality and intensifying Victor's), he uses few words, mainly to point out that if he had come home for lunch 'The cat wasn't home then'. Obviously, this proves that the cat is truly to be seen as a rival, not just as a symbol for Victor's sensuality, as Winston Rhodes and Copland seem to think. The acknowledgement of the cat as an individual coincides significantly with Victor's own insistence on **his** individuality and thus on his right to assert that over the claims of the cat. The very point of the fact that the cat goes on purring even though he holds it up by the legs indicates that in his own case as in the cat's a sensual response, once aroused, can, in the nature of things, not be stopped and controlled (except by death). And even if Victor's 'Filthy brute' just before he dumps the cat into the fire may just possibly suggest distaste for his own sensuality **according to his thinking**, that is not to say that we are to condemn him according to **Sargeson's thinking** or **Victor's acting**. There is, after all, the possibility that Sargeson quite approves of Victor's stifling his own sensuality; more likely, though, we are to observe the contrast between speech and action and see that it is the action which counts and which is effective, while the dialogue not only has been ineffective

but vexatious and frustrating—certainly to Victor, and possibly to Elsie. It may well be that for Elsie, too, Victor's action is actually 'good' in the unorthodox sense. There appears to be a curious Laurentian tendency to obey her new-found master (in a psychological sense) in the words italicized below:

> You want to lift the pan right up, Victor said. They're burning. Well, **Elsie lifted the pan** and Victor dumped the cat in the fire. **Elsie just stood there**, and Victor grabbed the pan and jammed it down on top of the cat. Then, not far away, you could hear the car, and **Victor went over to put his shirt on**.

Previously, Elsie had been quite vocal, and quite Victor's match in their verbal battle for power. Now that Victor decides to demonstrate his masculinity through physical force, there is not a word of protest or even a cry of fear—just docile action falling in with what we are probably to understand is nature's way. I can see no sign of horror on Sargeson's part whatever, no matter the reaction of his critics. Victor goes over 'to put his shirt on', no doubt, because the author wants to point out the resemblance between Victor's burning of the cat and what in another circumstance would have been copulation. There is a general air of quiet satisfaction at a job done, a result achieved:

> Look here, Elsie, he said, it's a fortnight to next sale day. If I was in your shoes I'd look round for another job.

One of the intriguing elements here is that the hero most definitely has not lost his cool, as one would expect it had been Sargeson's intention to show us a man 'tormented by pride . . . by his uncertainty . . . by a violent revulsion. 'There is no evidence that this is a tormented man, and uncertainty is something one definitely cannot accuse him of; he **is** violent, but in an extra-ordinarily definite and calm way, without 'revulsion'. Or at least the feelings which Winston Rhodes sees do not exist at this moment; patently, the action is beneficial to Victor's state of mind, and the author again follows Lawrence in seeing such calm as arising from the response of the mature, firm masculine will to sensual arousal—not so as to inhibit such arousal, but to act it out.

However, although much more could be said about this tale, the main points have now been made. It is Elsie who receives the author's censure rather than Victor: she treats his carnal being just as she does her chops, by heating to kill and by not recognizing that his vitality should be done justice to. Her way seems the more perverse because undoubtedly she gets satisfaction out of her dealing with the chops; she denies her own sensuality as well as Victor's, and derives pleasure from stifling life. It is this to which Victor—rightly, in the author's view—reacts. His vitality does express itself in violence, but the relief created by such violence appears to be preferable to the frustration

of a situation in which words and a woman's will, as shaped by society, are in danger of winning out. That, essentially, is Sargeson's message, however unpalatable it may be. It is not, obviously, the message of a particularly realistic tale; the author supports a romantic urge in a man who seems to be (as far as we can tell) unrealistically successful. And there is no question of the kind of underlying conventional morality that a more normal—let us say Christian or humane—attitude would offer us. Perhaps I am overstating or confusing the issue by using such words as 'normal' and 'Christian'; my point is, of course, that Sargeson's critics have too readily assumed that he shared their own more laudable standards and that dispassionate examination of the evidence does not bear them out.

It is important to realize that Elsie's chops are 'done' **before** Victor dumps the cat into the fire. Sargeson's procedure is in more than one story along these lines: what is done by an unorthodox character may upset us, but we must see that the true blame lies with someone else, who provoked such seemingly shocking action. Thus it is that guilt lies with the main character's parents in 'A Good Boy', that Jack's 'missis' should be blamed rather than he, and, as we shall see, that in stories of mateship, too, we should watch for the **first** signs of betrayal. This point is as important as the earlier one that out of two 'parties' one may be preferred, no matter some apparent faults, because the alternative is so very much less attractive. Indeed, it will help us to have both points in mind when confronting the short 'mateship' stories 'I've Lost My Pal', and 'A Great Day'. (The longer 'That Summer' which I have briefly referred to is also a story of mateship but hardly to our present purpose, since it is not conspicuously a violent story.)

The important clue to Sargeson's view of mateship is that it demands absolute loyalty. In yet another mateship story, 'A Pair of Socks', this point is made more transparently than in the two we are about to consider. 'Fred and me were cobbers right from the time we were kids', thus 'A Pair of Socks' assures us, and it shows that this long-lasting mutual allegiance should be unequivocally adhered to: to us, it may seem that the narrator's 'cobber' is behaving childishly when he is upset at the narrator giving another man a pair of socks, but Sargeson undoubtedly sides with the narrator's final view that he should have preferred 'the life Fred and me used to have'—for it is after the narrator's betrayal that things go wrong, and even 'a pearl of a sheila' cannot match Fred. The homosexual implications are, incidentally, characteristic. I do not necessarily mean that they are a primary concern to Sargeson, but I think it is true that he sees homosexual feelings as arising with perfect naturalness in relations between men because relations between men and women are generally inadequate in terms of the mateship which he so strongly values.

We should not, therefore, assume that in 'I've Lost My Pal' Sargeson's sympathy is not likely to be engaged by the homosexual character, George. Nor is it accidental that it is this character who is, in a sense, used to instruct us about the code of mateship, even though his teaching involves the murder of another male. This is Tom, the narrator's 'pal' (it is interesting that 'pal' is used, and not the far more frequent and different 'cobber'). The final comment provided by the narrator, is 'I'm sore at losing Tom. I am that. But I have to admit that he'd sometimes get on your nerves and make you feel tired by arguing silly. Haven't you ever felt like that with anyone? Own up. I bet you have'. Winston Rhodes (p.69), comments: 'After such an ending and despite the criminal brutality of the actions related, it is not easy to cast the first stone at the maimed character, George'. That, it seems to me, is one of this critic's more perceptive remarks about violence in Sargeson, and remind us of his fresh vision in the earlier essay 'The Moral Climate of Sargeson's Stories,'[15] after which his book seems so unexpectedly disappointing. Certainly Winston Rhodes appears to have a much better appreciation of this story than Horsman, whose comments I quoted at the beginning of this essay, and we shall see whose views are supported by the evidence.

The word 'maimed', with reference to George, seems more appropriate in its emphasis than 'vain and homosexual'—a description applied by Bill Pearson, although to this it should be added that on the whole Pearson is far less 'misguided' in seeing 'partisanship' in Sargeson than Horsman thinks.[16] George is maimed in the sense that his nerves have been weakened by the constant puritanical nagging that in Sargeson's opinion is typical of those who are powerful in his society—people like Tom in the present story, and Jack's wife in 'The Hole that Jack Dug'. A tendency to nag, to interfere and to criticize, from a restricted moral view, victimizing an essentially lively and sensitive person, is consistently attacked by Sargeson. In the present story, this tendency, shown to a remarkable extent by Tom, is symbolized by the barking dog which is not only killed by George, but deftly used by the author to indicate why inevitably George will kill Tom, and do so with justification: because it is with reference to the barking of the dog that he very precisely delineates his rigorous code which Tom ignores at his own—very real—risk. As the narrator informs us about George:

> Sometimes he'd go maggoty because one of the dogs would start barking. He said it got on his nerves. He said that was his only trouble in life. His nerves. He said he could stand anything except things that got on his nerves. If anything got on his nerves too much he'd do it in, and he sounded at the time like as if he meant it.

The kind of repetitiveness that the language exhibits here unmistakably reminds us once again of Lawrence in the stories discussed before, and there are other—highly significant—resemblances. As in 'The Fox', the killing of an animal and the killing of a human being are closely associated in that both are enemies, and the animal can usefully be employed as in part an image for the human opponent; only Sargeson gives Lawrence a somewhat ironic twist in that Lawrence uses the killing of the fox to anticipate the murder of Banford, while here, possibly with even greater horror inflicted on the reader, the strangling of the dog is something that—but then revealingly—**succeeds** that of Tom. To me the violence of this is even more repugnant than Henry's killing of Banford exactly because Lawrence at least presents his events openly to the reader.

However, the resemblance exists, and should almost certainly be to Henry's feelings about barking dogs in 'The Fox' (121):

> . . . he heard the dogs from the neighbouring cottage up the hill yelling suddenly and startlingly, and the waking dogs from the farms around barking answer. And suddenly it seemed to him England was little and tight, he felt the landscape was constricted even in the dark, and that there were too many dogs in the night, making a noise like a fence of sound, like the network of English hedges netting the view. He felt the fox didn't have a chance.

What Henry identifies with here is the fox, as against the 'dogs' which in Lawrence represent exactly what they do in Sargeson: the voice of oppressive, nagging puritanism. It is the voice of Banford in 'The Fox', and of Tom in 'I've Lost my Pal', and both, according to their authors, must be killed.

That is what happens, in Sargeson's case as in Lawrence's. The authorial dream is acted out in the fiction presented and which the reader is implicitly invited to accept. In Sargeson's view, George is not only the maimed character who must because of society's impositions and his spelling out of his code receive our sympathy, but who should also appeal because he acts on his code from the beginning. He it is who, against all the other adults, realizes man's duty to children (always supported by Sargeson), and expresses his humane bond with then through what in 'A Great Day', too, establishes the chief immediate link between mates: cigarettes. Furthermore, like for example Jack, and of course Sargeson himself, he is the type of the artist, a storyteller:

> He'd come outside with Tom and me, and we'd sit on the woodpile and smoke cigarettes and tell yarns.

The artistic ability is stressed several times, as in:

> We were too tired for anything except smoking one cigarette after another, and telling yarns.

Or later in:

> . . . I could have sat and listened to a chap like that all night if it hadn't been for the way the damned dog was barking.

The last quotation, however, on a second reading of the story reveals two other significant things: that the cigarettes are gone because meanwhile Tom has been killed (proving conclusively that they are a symbol for the bond of mateship) and that one reason why he was must be that he resembled the barking dog, who, for one thing, spoils artistry.

Tom, when listening to the stories of the homosexual George, shows no such innocence and delight as another youthful character, Coral, does in response to what appear to be tales made up about pin-ups by Lionel in 'An International Occasion'—the Lionel who is the first to emerge alive from the burning boardinghouse, and who in 'Charity Begins at Home' is described by the author in the following glowing terms:

> It was her surprising discovery that it was not so much the Major who focused her attention. It was Lionel—though more strictly, Lionel's arms and hands. The power of those great sinews was being employed with the most careful delicacy, with all the tenderness and discretion of Love.

Being grown-up to some extent, from society's viewpoint, Tom does not pay as much attention to George's 'corker body' as does the narrator, and, although we may be surprised at this, Sargeson's first sign of approval of George, as in Lionel's case, is in terms of splendid physique and care for it. Sargeson conveys to us what he considers should be the proper reaction to the artistry of his homosexual hero. Tom fails in getting 'narked' (that is, irritated) by George's unorthodoxy. An example of this is George's revelation that he'd have to wear a red flower on Mother's Day, if he did wear one, because he 'never had a mother.' And he shocks Tom by saying that when 'a joker had me for a pet', it was 'a Sunday school teacher'. Disapproval of Sunday school in Sargeson is something we have already seen in 'A Good Boy', and it is also apparent in, for example, the presentation of the Methodist minister in 'An Attempt at an Explanation'. Accordingly, we ought to be less and less surprised, if we are willing to accept the author on his own terms, that, after the warnings given before, George feels increasingly vexed by Tom, and gets rid of him.

The pattern of 'A Great Day', which quite rightly often seems to be seen as one of Sargeson's most arresting stories, can now be better understood. In the sequence of the story as presented (as distinct from the sequence of events which we learn precedes it), the image of cigarettes is again of crucial

importance. It is not Fred who betrays mateship in the first instance, but Ken. Not that there is much mateship between them anyhow: as Sargeson explains, 'about the only thing they had in common was that they both had cigarettes dangling out of their mouths'. Still, it is obvious that exactly when men have so little in common, on their joint journey, what they **can** share should be. Sargeson quite emphtically, **pace** his critics, shows that Ken fails to adhere to the code. The men are to go fishing together, but even before they 'shove off', Ken, who appears to think that his physical assistance will suffice, shows utter disregard for what really matters in relations between mates by the fact that while 'Fred got busy', he 'sat on the stern of the dinghy and rolled himself a cigarette'. Every detail in a Sargeson story must be pondered, but, in case we have not read carefully enough, Sargeson re-inforces his message a little further down: 'Ken, busy rolling a supply of cigarettes, didn't watch out where he was going . . .' And his selfishness, thoughtless rather than vicious though it may seemingly be, is apparent once again when eventually Fred has to **ask** him for a cigarette.

While all this may seem trivial enough to us, and hardly an excuse for murdering Ken, it is different for the author, who uses the image of the cigarettes to illustrate what should become ineluctably patent to us, namely that what is happening so far mirrors what precedes the story. What we have to tease out is first of all that prior to Ken's arrival on the scene Fred used to have a true mate, who—unusually in Sargeson—is female. 'I've known Mary for years, Fred said. . . . Up to a while Mary and I used to be great cobbers'.

The heterosexual reader may be forgiven for thinking that perhaps there was nothing specially significant to this relationship. It suggests **no more** than some sort of non-sexual relation between a man and a woman which he might not be too strongly hurt about losing. In the Sargesonian world, however, being 'cobbers' is having the **very best** relationship humans can engage in, and it is a great compliment to Mary that she is partner in a relationship as a rule only reserved for men. Normally, Sargeson views women with the distaste displayed towards Jack's 'missis'; if they are not horrible nagging puritans, the alternative virtually must be that they are 'sheilas'—simply animals of the opposite sex.

Therefore, before we jump to the conclusion (as is the standard reaction) that 'A Great Day' is a story in which Sargeson shows with horror how Fred abandons his mate Ken, we should weigh against each other the two relations so far described: the Ken-Fred one and the Fred-Mary one. If we do this, it should be evident that the important relationship, the one of true mates, is that of the two people who have known each other 'for years', and who 'used to be great cobbers'; it is this relationship which is destroyed by Ken,

a man only willing to give Fred a cigarette if appealed to, and who otherwise in a very grave sense has nothing 'in common' with him. Fred and Mary share not only a common past, but also the disadvantages which in Sargeson's Depression stories generally serve to bring people together: they lack Ken's prerogatives of wealth and education. We must observe that in Sargeson's mind education does not make Ken superior; it merely helps him if he wants to find a 'position', as he calls it, and it is to be seen as bought by materialism as well as furthering that. As Fred explains, 'Mary's got a bit of education too . . . Only when her old man died the family was hard up so she had to go into service'. Ken, by contrast, can not only buy education, but even Mary herself. It is significant that she works for his aunt, and Fred explains why he has not managed to stay 'cobbers' with Mary:

> If only a man hadn't lost his job, he said.

Our sympathy, the author has abundantly shown, must go to Fred. Even the smallest physical details serve to re-inforce this point. It will not be necessary to analyse the story exhaustively, but as an example we may look once again at the way Sargeson handles the 'bestiary' which he sets up throughout his stories. Here, we have the incident of Ken catching 'the smallest snapper you ever saw'. It can be no coincidence that it is Ken who is successful enough to catch something, and that what he does snatch, in its smallness, inescapably reminds one of Fred's slight stature, which is repeatedly emphasized in the story. Our sympathy is meant to be aroused, not only for the fish, but also for Fred, who, in words that we must apply to him as much as the fish, describes him as a 'poor littler beggar'. The precision of Sargeson's comparison is artistically exciting. Fred says to Ken: '. . . don't you wish you could swim like him?' It is only after re-reading the story that we realize that indeed Ken cannot swim like the fish, **but that Fred can**.

That becomes obvious at the end of the story, which we should now briefly consider, and particularly because it appears to be this, more than anythinng in the tale, which has generally shocked Sargeson's critics into thinking that surely he must be assumed to hold up Fred for our censure. Here, for example, is Winston Rhodes (70):

> . . . there still remains sufficient sensibility to make his life a misery as he starts on his solitary long pull back to the shore.

That is what this critic would like to believe, and so would I. However, we must make sure that we do not fantasize. What Winston Rhodes produces is his version of how things should end; what, by contrast, Sargeson produces is this:

> And after that, taking it easy, he started on his long swim for the shore.

Not only are Winston Rhodes' additions revealing (eg. 'solitary'), but apart from the complete lack of evidence justifying these, there is the presence of evidence of emotion running quite counter to the 'misery' which Winston Rhodes imagines Fred to experience. Since this kind of misreading is typical of the way Sargeson's meaning tends to get distorted, I must press his own words into attention by italicizing the chief ones:

> And after that, **taking it easy**, he started on his long swim for the shore.

The task ahead may be demanding, but there is no sign whatever of the hero's supposed 'misery', and every indication of his feeling relaxed after what he views as the main job for the day has been done. And in the light of the other evidence which I have produced even Pearson, whose response appears to be exceptional, probably understates the position when he says (p.15): 'There is a hint of satisfaction when Fred defeats Ken'. Rather, it appears that the whole strategy of the story is aimed at justifying a man who gets his own back on a rival by drowning him.

The stories we have so far chiefly considered date from the short period 1935-38, in the order: 'Cats by the Tail', 'A Good Boy', 'I've Lost My Pal', 'A Great Day', and 'Sale Day'. I have not quite kept to a chronological order in discussing them because in my argument it was more illuminating not, for example, to analyze 'Sale Day' last. But I honestly believe that in any case, whatever Sargeson's artistic development over these years, it is not generally helpful to follow Horsman in distinguishing between supposedly early opinionated sketches and more mature stories. The fact is that the first 25 stories in the volume date from the period 1935-38; as far as I can see, they distinguishably set up their own consistent 'world', and the level of artistic sophistication, however short some of the very first pieces may be, is quite extraordinarily high from the start. One may be justified in calling the second contribution, 'Cats by the Tail', a 'sketch' rather than a story in that its basis is in only one very briefly described incident; but even artistically it becomes more than a sketch, and the attitude of the author, certainly, is already typical. The reason why that attitude is so similar throughout the period 1935-38 is not far to seek: all of them are recognizably written against the background of the Depression and during the strong emergence of fascism. The period appears to have been one quite obsessively concerned with violence, and of course was so even if we take it a good deal further back. Without using unduly offensive and unfairly restrictive labels, one is struck by the similarity, in this regard, shown by authors in many ways as diverse as Sargeson, Lawrence and Yeats—for example the Yeats of 'The Second Coming' and 'Leda and the Swan'.

Of course, Sargeson also shows another possible reaction to the situation around him at that time: that of the left-winger (if that word serves any purpose) feeling compassion for the underdog. Such compassion is most movingly portrayed, and aroused in the reader, in stories like 'An Affair of the Heart', and 'That Summer'. For a fair appraisal of **The Stories of Frank Sargeson**, one would at the least have to show this other side to him. In the present context it should be observed, however, that this compassion for the underdog is by no means incompatible, in the 'world' of the stories, with an approval of violent means to secure a kind of justice for what are thought to be victims (e.g. 'I've Lost My Pal' and 'A Great Day').

'That Summer' (1938-41) may in many ways be seen as transitional, viewed retrospectively.[17] It is very obviously concerned with the Depression; it does show an unwarranted approval of such things as theft; but it lacks the almost oppressively pointed intensity of what goes before. Being predominantly a love-story between two men with a most poignant ending, it shows a more mellowed Sargeson than we find in either the violence of most of the stories so far discussed or the sentimentality (however touching) of 'An Affair of the Heart'. Yet, as I shall show in a subsequent essay,[18] 'That Summer' also moves towards an increasingly morbid despondency tending to be representative of later stories which do, I think, form a different group as belonging to the post-war years. But at the time Horsman was writing, this group consisted as yet only of a very small handful: a mere seven after 'That Summer'. I share his admiration for 'The Undertaker's Story', though I think his interpretation of it is misguided, but even if one agrees with many critics—that the later Sargeson manner and attitude in these stories are different (more urbane, elaborate, etc.) one may still find oneself ill at ease with some of the implications evoked. For example, 'The Hole that Jack Dug', for all its humour and playful inventiveness, underneath still exhibits unmistakable approval of Jack's wish to undermine what he sees as foundations of NZ society—hence his aiming particularly for his wife's wash-house. Sargeson appears to be indulging in a form of violence which the reader at first hardly stops to ponder and which in the end is abandoned. That is, the author first of all covers his tracks with his mode of presentation, and then—when Jack fills the hole again—shows that in any case the earlier Sargesonian violence has turned to some new sort of importance.

Impotence does seem to be what a good many of these last stories (I mean the dozen after 'That Summer') exhibit, and what at once they are 'about'. Significantly, one may observe yet one further shift. In the 1964 **Collected Stories**, Sargeson finishes with 'A Personal Memory'. This creates great hope for those who share Sargeson's view of the stifling mental climate in New

Zealand: 'my paternal grandmother was much too much herself ever to be assimilated to New Zealand life . . . all the deficiencies of my grandmother's housekeeping were amply compensated by her spiritual buoyancy . . . I doubt if there was ever any limit to her sympathies . . .'

But already we perhaps sense some nostalgia in this, a growing awareness that such qualities are becoming a thing of the past. And while 'The Colonel's Daughter', which preceded this piece in 1964, conveys a picture of an older 'Romantic' whose forceful opposition to her society in her youth comes through most strongly, she is also, significantly, old, and no longer particularly active as a rebel.

This preoccupation with ineffective old age is a dominant aspect of the final six stories in the 1973 volume, about which Lauris Edmond has written one of the most superbly satisfying essays on Sargeson so far.[19] I agree with her, for example, in thinking that in Sargeson's case we are looking at 'a range of work which exhibits some distorted or fragmented view of sexual love with disturbing frequency'. I would go so far as to suspect a close relationship between Sargeson's inadequate view of sexual love and his **penchant** for violence, and that there is such a relationship is clear in eg. Victor's instance—what is harder to speculate on is how exactly it is to be viewed. But, again, Lauris Edmond is right in stressing it with respect to 'Charity Begins at Home' (1966). As she says, 'Mrs Hitchinghorn . . . sees through a window the Major's bedraggled and unsavoury naked body, and she looks at it 'greedily'. The word is unexpected and inappropriate, almost offensive; not because it is too bold, or says too much, but because what is, or should be, most important in this moment of intense experience it does not say at all'.

Still, it is Sargeson who offends, and it is really astonishing that an author with such a warped sense of values—coming so plainly to the fore in a story like this, for all to see—should be accepted so unquestioningly, however much one may and should admire his artistic skill and the better side of his nature.

Unfortunately, this is not much in evidence in the last story we need to consider, and which makes the volume end on a singularly distasteful violent note. This is 'An International Occasion', which I feel, Ms Edmond interprets least well. She sees a rather simple contrast between Karl (a Swede) whose 'cosmopolitan sophistication, though somewhat romantically linked to emotional exuberance and intellectual subtetly, provides an effective opposition to Chris's bored and destructive provincialism'. Since she also says that in these stories Sargeson's 'sympathies are still strong and secure—indeed remarkably unchanged', I think I may take it, without too much distortion, that on the whole she sees Sargeson's sympathies as lying with Karl, and against Chris. But, to give Sargeson his due, his attitude to either character is less

simple than it might at first appear. There is a change away from the more clear-cut dichotomy in most of the stories. Sargeson is not primarily defending Karl against Chris, or even vice versa, but presenting a helplessly despondent view of New Zealand society as it must have seemed to him around 1969 (when the story appeared first), and indeed in 1973 (when it concluded the collection under discussion). His despondence, apparently unable to find another outlet, vents its frustrated impotence in the destructive act of setting things on fire, so that 'the house came to life'.

In that sense, in fact, Sargeson's sympathy reaches out towards Chris rather than Karl. And if this were not so, Sargeson would never have spoken, rather close to the end of this story, of Chris's 'dejected and desolate head': these are not adjectives applied to a character for whom strong disapproval is felt.

The most admirable character in the story, Ms Edmond and I agree, must in Sargesonian moral terms be Lionel, who is poor (always a reason for sympathy in Sargeson), not the kind of insensitive, superficial intellectual that Karl is, nor yet as enviously destructive as Chris. It is significant that the seemingly attractive Karl (whom most characters in the story wrongly dislike altogether, or at least strongly suspect) dumps his 'poor and grubby' furniture, with Lionel's help, '**out of sight** in the dark cave of the cellar beyond his [Lionel's] poor grubbily furnished room'. In other words, when getting his new Scandinavian furniture, Karl quite unfeelingly disposes of something he had in common with Lionel: poverty, grubbiness, and all the things Sargeson tends to associate with that side of existence. It is ironic that Lionel is so kind that it is **he** who feels well-treated: 'Karl . . . was a good friend for anyone to have if you knew the right way to take him'.

In view of such evidence, it is no doubt significant that when Chris sets the house on fire, 'Lionel was the first to appear'. He is accompanied by Coral, the child in the story (and who therefore also is to be saved). Karl survives, with his prostitute, and since both are outsiders and treated with a reasonable degree of sympathy, the implication appears to be that they, too, are rightly spared. Similarly with Mrs Dashing, almost certainly another prostitute, who had at once recognized Karl's when meeting her again on the occasion of the party which forms the central incident of the story prior to Chris's fire. Good reasons can, I think, be found why none of the other characters except Chris stay alive. For example, Jerry, although an Australian (and thus, as an outsider, a potential candidate), probably goes down with Slim because they are stagnated characters, not appreciating pork cooked by Karl ('What do you reckon? It don't taste right if you ask me, not when it's pork, not like you'd expect'.). Miss Bloom, a repressed virgin, is metaphorically, literally, and no doubt deservedly, 'most terribly trapped in her room off the kitchen'.

Furthermore, Lawrence once again comes to mind not only in the obvious dislike of Miss Bloom's puritanism, but in the way the violence of the story is presented. Chris at first merely shadow-boxes: as in the case of Henry's shooting the fox, the truly significant act of violence is still to occur.[20] And so it does, eventually, not only with the destruction of the house, but also, in a manner of speaking, of Chris's 'angel', the kind of do-gooder whom Sargeson always intensely hates in these stories. Chris's 'terrible' uppercut landing on him is no doubt in fact supported by the author, and we may (as so often) note the Blakean ironies here: what is 'terrible' is not necessarily bad to Sargeson, and the 'angel' (cf. Blake's 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell') is hardly truly to be seen as such; he is a phoney 'family man interested in social good works, who in days when they were soldiers together had conceived for Chris a powerful emotional friendship which had never abated'. Physically, too, this specimen is most distasteful: 'A little man with sparse hair and thick-lensed glasses, he stood pigeon-toed . . .' It really is difficult to believe that Sargeson does not predominantly approve of Chris's sending this individual to 'float horizontally in the air, briefly transformed into something which appeared to justify its name'. The subtle language is telling: 'transformed' suggests that this man never in any way was an 'angel', and 'appeared' carefully controls the reader's urge to extend any sympathy.

Once again, then, a violent solution is sought to what the author experiences as profound difficulties in his society or his own being, and it is this distressing tale with which we are left. One may find some satisfaction in experiencing Sargeson's violence imaginatively, but it remains violence for all that, and I must say I abhor the way he selects, in this story, those with whom he sympathizes and those whom he condemns. To think that he does not take sides is to ignore his own words:

> It is impossible for any serious novelist to finish his story without letting you know (at any rate implicity), that he has judged his characters. Much of your feeling about the quality of his work will depend upon whether or not you are convinced that his judgement are the right ones.[21]

By these—the author's own—standards, I would logically have to disapprove strongly of much of the fiction discussed in this essay; and indeed in moral terms I do. However, I would nevertheless wish to defend Sargeson against an unduly severe judgement to which his own view of fiction might lead us. One may at the least grant that the author's values presented through an art so subtle that even the shock effects have the positive value of making the reader very intensely probe his own standards. The art in this respect is more than something merely clever or imaginatively appealing (by no means an insignificant aspect of art): its richness and complexity preclude a

simplistic response even though on analysis Sargeson turns out to be quite right in suggesting that we know that like any novelist he has judged his characters. The art assumes a peculiar moral value in standing as a screen (not a barrier) between the author and the reader, eventually leading the reader to what I think is often quite the wrong moral view, but fully aware of the opinion the reader himself is most likely to adopt, and thus, although no doubt in part unintentionally, in the end provoking in the reader the more strongly the kind of response he started off with. And, of course, in some instances we may well be quite properly led to adopt the author's view away from where we began; I am not suggesting that his values are invariably wrong. For example, the criticism of the Methodist minister in 'An Attempt at Explanation', however loaded by our awareness (but not his) of poverty, makes its point quite convincingly by presenting him as 'touching the flowers with his walking stick'; this apparently innocuous action assumes grave symbolic importance in a judgement which ultimately is not unfair—this man is a sham, unconcerned about the rest of creation, and indeed showing some destructive tendency.

However, although Sargeson sometimes has his heart in the right place, almost always creates impressively, and has a right to upset and disturb us, we would in the end do even him an injustice by sentimentalizing his stories into something they are not (for they must be allowed to have their impact); and we ourselves should face the painful truth about his vision, however much we might prefer not to. Both for the sake of academic values and those of civilization, we have a duty to attend to the facts and present them as we see them.

NOTES

1. Auckland: London Paul, 1973. All references to Sargeson's stories are to this edition unless otherwise mentioned. References are so numerous that it would become quite impractical to provide a page reference for each individual one. Nor will this be necessary, since the stories are sufficiently short (with the exception of 'That Summer') to enable quotations to be recalled. The titles of the stories, to which I do refer in each instance, are readily found in the list of Contents (p.5). The collection is now also available in Penguin Books (1982).

2. In a short review of Copland's booklet (below, note 4), entitled 'Ways of Reading' (pp.359-60). In this, as in other references to brief discursive notes/essays, page references are to the complete piece of writing. Only for longer essays, and for books, will individual page references be given.

3 **Frank Sargeson** (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), p.70.

4. **Frank Sargeson** (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.13.

5. 'The Art of Frank Sargeson', **Landfall**, XIX (1965), pp.129-34.

6. I shall suggest that this is so, for example, in 'Charity Begins at Home'.

7. Sargeson's attitude may be ambiguous in this respect in the story discussed last ('An International Occasion'); it rejects definitely such puritan, anti-life violence (slight though if may sometimes be) as is found in the minister of 'An Attempt at Explanation', in 'Old Man's Story', and in 'Two Worlds' (where the grandpa with 'the buggy whip in his hand' is a 'Belfast man').

8. All subsequent italics are mine.

9. Indeed, even if the undertaker is not entirely repudiated the logical fact still remains that he may well be found less attractive than his opponent. The flaw in Horsman's logic is that he is not sufficiently relativistic: the point is that A. may be far from perfect, yet superior to B.; or X. may have some good points, yet be inferior to Y. For A. we may substitute the colonel's daughter, or for X. the undertaker. The fact remains that 5 is more than 3, even if it is not 10; 2 is more than 0, but less than

5. Sargeson is not necessarily thinking in absolute terms, but that is not to say he does not take sides. (And see his own comment quoted near the end of this essay.)

10. Sargeson regularly uses terms like 'good' the Blakean way. That is, he wants the reader to see that what is 'good' according to the conventional standards of society, is not necessarily so to him. For example, in 'Good Samaritan', which immediately precedes 'A Good Boy', Sargeson at the end shows a character confused between the conventionally 'right' thing (which in fact is truly wrong), and the 'wrong' thing which is is truly right.

11. Winston Rhodes, p.70.

12. See Winston Rhodes, pp.54-55 and especially 69. In the second instance, concerning 'I've Lost My Pal', this critic seems to me more alert than in the first, about 'A Good Boy', but in both instances he is at the least moving in the right direction. I wish to stress that despite my disagreements with him, I greatly appreciate much of the work done by Winston Rhodes.

13. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960. (I quote from the 1974 imprint.) The stories were first printed by Martin Secker in 1923, some ten or so years before Sargeson began to produce significant writings. It must have been difficult for Sargeson to escape from Lawrence's gripping influence. Here was a fellow-Puritan rebelling against his background who could teach him to use the art of supposedly 'realistic' fiction in the cause of a Romantic struggle for freedom: not least Romantic in that neither author ever succeeded in shaking off his background.

14. The function of Lawrence's symbolism, and the background from which it springs, is brilliantly illuminated by Lawrence O. Jones in 'Physiognomy and the Sensual Will in **The Ladybird** and **The Fox**', **The D.H. Lawrence Review**, Vol.13, No.1 (1980), pp.1-29. Jones entirely demolishes the rather fashionable present-day view that Lawrence somehow disapproved of Henry's violence. Like Sargeson, Lawrence has been quite 'sentimentalized''by modern intellectuals with little understanding of the mental climate between the two World Wars.

15. First printed in **Landfall**, IX (1955), 25-41; afterwards in **Landfall Country**, ed. Charles Brasch (Christchurch: the Caxton Press, 1962), pp.412-29.

As the essay concludes, Sargeson criticism 'cannot be confined to aesthetics'.

16. See Pearson's introductory essay to **Frank Sargeson: Collected Stories 1935-1963** (Auckland: Blackwood & Janet Paul, 1964). Not only does the essay remain valuable, but so does the Glossary compiled with Sargeson.

17. I am leaving out of account eight other stories also to my mind typical of the pre-war Sargeson and by which the group of 25 could be extended. I set off that group of 25 only because it spans my examples from 'Cats by the Tail' (1935) to 'Sale Day', which in the 1973 volume is incorrectly listed as dating from 1939; this should be 1938, as in the 1964 volume.

18. Forthcoming in the **ACLALS Bulletin**.

19. 'The Later Stories', in the section 'In Sargeson's 71st year', **Islands** 6 (Summer 1973), 415-23. I am predominantly concerned with the last few pages, but the whole essay is worth reading.

20. Observe also the kinship with 'I've Lost my Pal': although the dog there is killed **after** the murder of Tom, there is a similar relationship between two acts of violence illustrating each other, and indeed Tom's murder is anticipated by the violence George inflicts on the lamb which he rips across the belly.

21. Appropriately quoted by Lawrence Jones in a somewhat similar context concerning value-judgements. Cf. Jones's brief essay: 'Once is not Enough: on Re-reading Sargeson', **Islands** 21 (1978), pp.268-72.